

25 Travel Blogging Secrets – How to Make Money and Travel Blog Successfully

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This is a bare bones report. I'm not trying to write a book and if you are like me, you just want the facts. These are the secrets that I've discovered. You may know some of them, you probably don't know all of them. These 25 secrets have earned me tens of thousands of dollars. I haven't gotten rich from blogging, but I've earned more than most travel bloggers and less than a few of them. With all that being said, here are the 25 things that I've learned and so far kept to myself.

General Tips 1-7

- 1) *Most travel bloggers don't make any money.* Maybe this isn't a secret to you, but to me it was. For a long time I looked at all the ads on different travel blogs and I thought, 'Wow, they must be raking it in.' Nope. I've met many of the top bloggers out there and most of them are doing it for love. A few of them make money at it, but mostly, those ads you see are affiliate links that only pay when someone makes a purchase. As for the google ads, most of the bloggers I know are making something like \$5 a day or less with google ads. Sure, it's money, but it's not much. Hopefully that makes you feel better if you have been struggling, if you are just starting out, it may sound discouraging, but don't worry. You can earn money.
- 2) Get a logo and original theme. Most of the travel blogs I see are crap. They are using standard wordpress, typepad, or blogger themes that anyone can get for free. You don't need to spend a lot to get them done, but an original theme and a custom logo/header put you above 90% of the crowd. Here is the secret, *if people see you and think you are professional, you are professional.*
- 3) *Don't waste your money on an expensive theme and logo.* What? Didn't I just say you should get them? Yes. you should. But, get them cheap. Go to <http://forums.digitalpoint.com> and sign up. Comment for a few days and learn some interesting things. After you can post (a waiting period that requires some comments) post a contest for anywhere from \$5 to \$100 for your logo or custom theme. The more you make it, the more 'entries' you will get. Some will be crappy and some will be by kick ass designers who are just starting out.
- 4) I write my own e-books but not everyone does. If you go to <http://www.vworker.com> you can post a job and find someone to write your ebook for anywhere from \$50 and up. I don't recommend digital point for this one since most of the writers you will find there are non-English native speakers and you will have to spend considerably more time editing than if you use vworker and screen the workers.
- 5) *An ebook is incredibly useful to encourage people to sign up for your email list, to make*

comments, or just to promote your blog – (make sure the ebook has live hyperlinks to your blog on every page!). You can make a photo ebook, a destination book, or just have someone put your travel journals into a nice e-book format. The Lonely Planet ebook that I was just featured in with 39 other top travel bloggers cost them thousands of dollars. I've seen others that were just as good but only cost \$100 to produce. Don't waste your money on expensive designers unless you have money to waste. In fact, if you have money to waste, give it to me and I will get your ebook made for you.

6) Use pretty pictures in every blog post. People love pretty pictures. And you know what? You can get great destination pictures from <http://www.flickr.com> with a creative commons license that costs you nothing. By all means, use your own pictures, but if you are camera challenged, throw in some from flickr with the proper attribution.

7) Make sure you put a way for readers to contact you on EVERY page and post of your blog. Yes, you will get spam, but this is where you can earn your money. I see hundreds of blogs without a contact form or with just an email written like this mike(at)mikesblog.com. Don't do it, make it easy for people to reach out to you. Learn to recognize spam, but don't delete them yet, there might be money to be made from these emails.

Making Money Tips 8-15

8) I hear a lot of my fellow bloggers complaining about all the spam they get. Here is the typical spam:

sex/viagra/penis enlargement – just delete it

Dearest one, millions of dollars – delete it

link exchanges – don't delete it

special offer of travel product – don't delete it

guest post with commercial link – don't delete it

Always, write back to the spam that I've indicated you shouldn't delete. Tell them that you don't do link exchanges, allow commercial posts, or promote special travel products BUT you do sell advertising on your site. Yes, I'm telling you to ask them for money.

9) *Don't undervalue yourself!!!* I know bloggers with great blogs, huge followings, and low self esteem who sell banner ads on their sites for \$20 a year or put up links for \$5 and never remove them! Your blog is like commercial real estate, you wouldn't rent a house for pennies, right? If you've followed the tips above your blog looks professional and is professional. At a minimum, your links are worth \$10 per month and your banners are worth \$15 per month. Don't go any lower than that because you are cheating yourself. Trust me, this is nothing to advertising budgets. I charge \$30 per month for links and my smallest sidebar banner starts at \$35 per month.

10) Offer guest posts/advertorials/sponsored reviews. I offer sponsored reviews for \$350 with the link remaining live for one year. My reviews are honest and I tell people if it is sponsored. *Don't take less than \$100 for a sponsored post or review and don't give them lifetime links.* After a year or six months if you want to be really mercenary make the links no follow using the rel="nofollow" attribute. All of the links leading off your site should look like this in html <a rel="nofollow" href="<http://www.vagobond.com>">Vagobond unless someone is paying you with either a guest post, a valuable reciprocal link, or some cold hard cash.

11) Want to find companies with advertising budgets in the travel niche? Go to all of those travel blogs with google ads installed and click on their ads. Use the contact forms on their webpages to contact them. Tell them about your site, tell them about your social media, offer them your rate sheet. Let them know that you are in the niche and you offer a better value and loyal readers. If they are spending on Google Adwords, they are spending too much. *If they are already spending on advertising, they will be more receptive to giving you money to advertise on your blog.*

12) Pump up your social media. If you don't have twitter, a facebook fanpage, and an RSS feed with subscribers you are not only missing out on a way to reach new readers, you are also missing out on a valuable stat that advertisers are looking for. If you want to get more subscribers, followers, or likes, it is very easy. Buy them. Go to <http://www.fiverr.com> and click on social media. *You can purchase hundreds or thousands of followers, likes, or subscribers for \$5.* Seriously. - a little note though – buying these things is only recommended if you are just beginning and looking for a boost – if you buy them after you are established you run the risk of 'burying' the real people who value your work.

13) Use smart affiliate links. *Banners have never really worked for me as affiliate links.* Use your banners for direct advertisers or for your own promotions. Sign up for affiliate programs at <http://www.commissionjunction.com> or other affiliate sites. What works? Put links into your posts. I have the most success with creating a box midpost that says "(fill in the blank) Resources" and then I put links to whatever affiliates might apply.

14) Here are *my six highest paying affiliates.*

World Nomads Travel Insurance <http://www.worldnomads.com>

HostelWorld <http://www.hostelworld.com>

TravelGrove <http://www.hotelscombined.com>

Expedia <http://www.expedia.com>

DHR <http://www.dhr.com>

Amazon <http://www.amazon.com>

To sign up just scroll to the bottom of the pages and click on affiliates or partners.

15) *Sell something on your site.* Seriously, if you aren't selling something, you are missing out on some money. Just figure out something that you can sell. Look at every successful travel blog and you will find that the blogger is selling something. I sell my books, some people sell souvenirs, tours, or even their art. You don't have to be an aggressive tout, but sell something. I make less money from my books than I do from ad sales and affiliates, but I do make money from them.

Content and Blog Creation 16-22

16) If you don't own your own domain, just get one. I know people who are successful with blogspot and wordpress.com sites, but if you want to look professional, get your domain. To get your domain, go to GoDaddy.com and purchase it. Before you pay search for GoDaddy Promotion code in google and you will find coupons that will save you a few extra dollars. It will cost you less than \$15 per year and you can redirect it to your existing site if you have one, automatically set up a wordpress blog if you don't, and you get your domains email included. *Having your own domain makes you professional and isn't expensive. (Bonus secret – you can get someone to set it all up for you at fiverr.com for \$5!)*

17) People don't usually end up at your blog because they are bored. They come to your blog because they are looking for something. Give your blog a tight focus and be sure to give your readers value. As an example, Vagobond.com is about world travel and I offer world travel tips plus my own perspective on what I see. *Be consistent, focus on your topic, and make sure that you are giving the readers something they can value or they will never come back.*

18) *Great guest posts are free content.* These days about 30% of my content comes from writers other than me. As my site has grown, I have less time to write. In addition, since I'm often on the road, it's nice to have fill in posts by other writers. I give guest bloggers a link back to their site with the 'dofollow' attribute. Make sure that you specify you want original and well written articles. You are the editor so you should make the call and set the standard.

19) *You don't have to travel to have a travel blog.* That's right. You don't have to travel to be a travel blogger. Here are some options: 1) guest posts as mentioned above 2) write about your past travels 3) research and write about destinations 4) write about people who do travel

20) *You can and should utilize ideas from other blogs.* I want to be clear here, I'm not saying that you should steal content – I'm saying that when you find a great angle on a story, feel free to use it for YOUR story. Make a point of cruising through other people's travel blogs. When you see a story, a feature, or even a design you like – let it inspire you. You should adapt it and make it into your own, but just do it. Look at all those great Lonely Planet titles "Six Secret Beaches" "10 Perfect Honeymoons" etc.

21) *Hire a rewriter to professionally rewrite great articles that fit with your topic.* Obviously you can't rewrite something like my Sahara Nomad Wedding, but if you hire a good rewriter at fiverr.com, vworker, or the forums at digitalpoint you can turn one great article into a series of original guest posts.

22) *Make your titles irresistible.* If you look back at some of the early titles of posts on Vagobond you will find big yawners like 'Vagobond in Canada' and you will see that the stats on those posts are pathetic. But something like '27 Quick World Travel Tips' brings people in. "The Penis Park in Samcheok, South Korea" got 600 views in the first fifteen minutes after it was posted during which time I sold five copies of Liminal Travel. That works out to about \$100 per hour. Great titles, pretty pictures, and content that gives the reader some value. That's how you make money travel blogging.

Promotion 23-25

For me, promotion is a bit of a bummer. I'm just not into it, but it's incredibly important. Here is the usual advice that you should do.. Write guest posts for other travel blogs (like Vagobond.com for example) and include a link back to your blog. Use Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. Put all of your posts on both. And of course, read other travel blogs and make interesting and useful comments. Finally, make sure you do link building. You want links coming from other travel sites to your site. Now for a couple of secrets to help you.

23) *Hire virtual assistants from EasyOutsource.com to do all or part of your social media, blog commenting, and link building for you.* Be very specific in what you want, set milestones for payment, and in terms of commenting, either pre-write them yourself and have them post them or make sure they understand what you want 100%.

24) Join travel blogger/travel writer social networks and be active. Ask questions, ask for advice, and collaborate with blog carnivals, interviews, or guest posting. Find out what works. Here are a couple of them: Tripitini.com, Travelwriterexchange.com, Vagobonding.com.

25) Don't give up! There are literally millions of dead travel blogs. It's not easy. My grandfather used to say "With persistence and sweet oil you can screw a snake", luckily we don't have to, but the same goes for making money with your travel blog, persistence and sweet oil and you will succeed. Don't expect to make it overnight, but if you follow these 25 tips, you will succeed and you will make money.

Let me know if you have any tips beyond these and how these work for you. Feel free to come steal my ideas at <http://www.vagobond.com> too.